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## **“Fear God!” Proverbs 1:1-7**

### **Introduction**

Today we begin a three month series on the book of Proverbs that will take us up until the celebration of the season of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. I have loved the book of Proverbs since I was a teenager and had a in-depth study of it in our youth group. I found my notes from that study this week again—a study in which I had to index every verse in every chapter of Proverbs as one of my assignments.

Proverbs is a great book that will easily compel our attention over the next few months as we approach the book more topically than expositionally, though each week we will be considering one main text and then scouring the book for additional text as well as comparing other portions of Scripture with this wisdom literature. Here's a look at the messages ahead in this series I am calling “Living Wisely!”

- Fear God
- Seek Wisdom
- Guard Your Heart
- Drink Purity
- Go Work
- Speak Words
- Honor Wealth
- Walk with Friendship
- Find Marriage
- Discipline Children

As we embark on this series, I trust that you will consider these ancient but wisest of words and that you will purpose with me to live a Proverbs-driven life as Anthony Selvaggio has titled his book! In this book indeed there is wisdom for living that is driven by the fear of the Lord!

This morning I have two ambitious goals: to give a brief, but somewhat comprehensive introduction to the book and to the genre of Proverbs itself, to examine the book's prologue, and to challenge us based on this prologue to live wisely by fearing God. So we will take our time getting to know this book first and then secondly considering the fear of God which is the beginning of knowledge. In both major points we will engage in a question and answer format that will assist us in learning these truths.

Let's begin by reading the book's first seven verses which give the preface, the author's objective for the book, a call to the hopeful to receive it, and then the motto of the book.

*“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth — Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:1–7)*

## **Introducing Proverbs**

- The first thing we see in this prologue is they are called “the proverbs of Solomon.” What is a proverb? Here are some definitions that have been given from several sources:
  - “A pithy saying with thought-provoking”
  - “Compressed truth”
  - “The power of brevity over the clarity of verbosity”
  - “A stubby sentence pregnant with meaning”
  - “College in a cup”
  - “Wisdom on the go!”
  
- How are these Proverbs unique?
  - In some ways not unique
    - Other cultures had them (Babylon, Egypt, Edom. . . ). Lots of other cultures had proverbs. Ones as ancient as Sumer and great civilizations surrounding Israel such as Babylon and Egypt and lesser ones such as Edom boasted of wise men who spoke often in proverbs. We know from history that such cultures as the Chinese often used the form of proverbs.
    - Prevalent in Hebrew world: Many leaders and well-known Biblical personalities outside of Solomon spoke in Proverbs. You find examples in the patriarchs, in the prophets and in the kings such as David.
    - Scattered throughout all the Bible (Law, prophets, NT)
      - Jeremiah talks about priests and prophets, and sages. Jesus alludes to the Proverbs. He uses a similar form of OT proverbs when he spoke often in parables. Other biblical writers like James, Paul, and the author of Hebrews all employ a proverb or two as well.
  - Yet they are unique from other cultures
    - Grounded in a covenant relationship with God (implicit/explicit)
      - Whereas other proverbs from other cultures often used the form of proverbs, this book by Solomon is unique because it presupposes that those who heed them have a covenantal relationship with God.
        - *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)*
        - *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” (Proverbs 31:30)*

- Although the Lord is mentioned clearly in the Proverbs, the gospel rather than being clearly proclaimed is simply assumed! A relationship with the Supreme Giver of Wisdom, the God of Israel, is a presupposition underlying the whole book.
- Divinely inspired and infallible: Whereas other proverbs are often helpful in life, well-spoken, and true (“haste makes waste”, “ a penny saved is a penny earned”, etc.), only these are the product of the breath of God and are incapable of failing and reflect true truth.
- Who wrote Proverbs and when?
  - Main author: Solomon (1:1); Solomon was the wisest man on earth and wrote over 3000 proverbs ( Kings 3:12, 4:29-34, of which only 1/3 are recorded. His contributions make up the core of the book with two collections.
  - Others contributors: Agur, Lemuel, Hezekiah (Proverbs 30:1; 31:1)
  - Main editor: Hezekiah (Proverbs 25:1)

Solomon lived and reigned roughly from 1000-930 BC. He reigned over Israel for 40 years, just like his father David did. But as we have seen Hezekiah's men actually compiled many of the proverbs of Solomon in their present form and he lived around 700 BC, some 250 years after Solomon reigned.

- What are the objectives of Proverbs? (vv. 2-6)
  - Two-fold summary
    - Equips us for with moral skill for holy living
    - Imparts mental discernment
  - Ten-word description
    - “wisdom”: skillful living in God's world (v. 2) *hokma*)
    - “instruction”: learning through discipline (v. 2): education through correction; corporeal punishment as well as internal discipline
    - “words of insight”: distinguishing between two thoughts or actions and understanding why one is God's choice
    - “instruction in wise dealings”: example of Abigail (1 Samuel 25:3) who dealt wisely with the request of David's men. Also found in Isaiah 52:13 to refer to Jesus Christ, “my Servant shall act wisely.”
    - “prudence”: understands trends and inherent dangers and avoids wrong paths
    - “knowledge”: a personal experience of walking in relationship with God and his ways
    - “discretion”: ability to protect yourself and to form a practical plan of action
    - “learning”
    - “guidance”: a word often used in the ancient world of ropes to steer a ship
    - “understand a proverb, a saying, . . .”: grasp [same word as in verse 2] truth statements [proverb and words of the wise] and more indirect streams of wisdom [sayings and riddles].
- Who is the intended audience of Proverbs?
  - General audience (vv. 4-6)

- “Simple”: naïve, gullible
- “Youth”: young, immature, lacking direction
- “Wise”: more mature, a journey not a destination.
- “Fool”:

Some have seen in 1 John 2 a parallel to Proverbs 1 when it speaks of “children, young men, and fathers” being the “simple, youth, and wise”. It is an interesting observation. What is for sure is that there is nothing wrong with being “simple” or a “youth at some stage, but God's desire is that we become wise. And what else is for sure is that God does not want us to be fools.

“The wise” refer to those who show discipline, discernment, understanding, prudence, knowledge and the other descriptive phrases in vv. 2-6.

The word “fool” is one of the words used in Proverbs to describe an unwise person. Some are just “naive”, gullible, silly and wasting his life. There are actually two words for “fool” in Proverbs, the first Hebrew word describing someone who refuses to learn, who is stubborn, refusing to listen to his parents. He is not stupid or mentally deficient but rather spiritually thick-headed. The word for “fool” in 1:7 is a different Hebrew word which means “without restraint, morally insolent, now who mocks at sin. The decline moves to a “nabal”, a term used only a handful of times describing someone who is closed completely to God, even denying his existence (Psalm 14:1). And then finally there is a scoffer, a confirmed rebel against God (21:24).

- Specific audience: young men who face challenges and opportunities for responsible adulthood and for fathers/mothers who are instructing them

The book of Proverbs was written by a father to his son. In fact, you see a multigenerational vision for the family in Proverbs 1:1, “The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David” who writes to his son (1:8). The term “my son” appears 15 times in the first 9 chapters of this book and eight more times in the remaining chapters. Here we see the father is charged with the responsibility of training his children, specifically his son. So, I want to strongly encourage fathers and sons not to miss one message in this series and to specifically talk about each message together. This doesn't mean that women, mothers, and daughters can't benefit from this series, nor does it mean that if you don't have any sons or your children are already gone that there is little in Proverbs for you. No, nearly every book in the Bible was written to a specific audience. The book of Samuel and Kings was written for the pre-exilic people of Israel, the book of Chronicles for the post-exilic people. Matthew was written to a Jewish audience whereas Luke was written for Hellenistic Greeks and Galatians was written for, well, Galatian Christians. But we still read each one of these books and glean valuable truth for life. Likewise Proverbs is for everyone, but especially written for young men who would be the leaders of their home, of their covenant community, of their country one day soon.

- What is the theme of Proverbs? (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10)

“The fear of the Lord leads to divine wisdom for righteous living before a holy God.”

- How does Proverbs point to Christ?
  - Jesus lived wisdom (Luke 2:41-50)
  - Jesus is wisdom (1 Cor 1:30; Colossians 2:3)
  - Jesus is the way to wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6-8)
  - Jesus supplied wisdom (Ephesians 1:17; James 1:5; Matthew 12:42)
- How Proverbs organized?
  - Prologue (1:1–7)
  - A tenfold call to pursue wisdom (1:8–9:18)
  - The proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)
  - Sayings of the wise (22:17–24:34)
  - More proverbs of Solomon (the Hezekian collection) (25:1–29:27)
  - The words of Agur (30:1–33)
  - The words of King Lemuel (or rather, of his mother) (31:1–9)
  - An acrostic of wifely excellence (31:10–31).
- How should you read Proverbs?
  - Remember they are truth statements stripped to essentials (not exhaustive)
  - Read in context (Scriptural and theological). Don't build your theology on one Proverb. Don't build the sayings of Proverbs 10-31 without the theology of Proverbs 1-9.
  - Proverbs are consistent observations of life, not categorical absolutes; generalizations not unconditional promises (Proverbs 22:6)
  - Make obedience to God the goal of your reading, not selfish gain

### **Wisdom's beginning: the fear of the LORD**

- Where do we learn about the fear of the LORD?
  - Proverbs (1:7, 9:10; 15:33)
  - Wisdom literature (Job 28:28; Psalm 11:10, Ecclesiastes 12:11-13)
  - OT (Genesis 20:11; 22:12)
  - NT (19 times; Matthew 10:28; Acts 9:31; 10:2)
- What does “the fear of the LORD” mean?
  - “The soul of godliness”--Murray
  - “Respect, adoration, and amazement”--Jerry Bridges
  - “Bitter dread and sweet reverence”--Mayhue

Ed Welch shows it as a continuum ranging from terror, dread, trembling, astonishment, awe, reverence, devotion, trust, worship. The fear of the Lord understands like the beavers did of Aslan in Narnia, that God is not necessarily safe, but he is good! You see the fear of the Lord begins as we become aware of the holy justice of God. And then as it grows we become aware of the holy love of God.

By the way be sure to take that phrase as a whole: “the fear of the Lord.” We tend to separate it into two parts: fear and LORD. But just like water is combination of hydrogen atoms and oxygen atoms, and cement is more than just water over here and concrete here, so “fear of the LORD” needs to be understood together. You will never understand what a “butterfly” is by breaking down the word into “butter” and “fly.” So too “fear of the LORD” is only understood together not as two separate components.

- What are some possible responses to the fear of the Lord?
  - No fear (Romans 3:18)
  - Fear consequences of sin but reject God's redemption (Romans 13:3-5; Rev 6:15-17)
  - Care about their sin but don't have a right relationship with God: illustration of Israelites in Paul's day (Acts 13:16, 26)
  - Affectionately fear God because of salvation and care about reducing sin in their lives (2 Corinthians 7:1)
- Where do you learn the fear of the LORD?
  - Scripture: *“Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared.”* (Psalm 119:38)
  - Prayer: *“Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.”* (Psalm 86:11)
  - Parents: *“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”* (Psalm 34:11)
- What does the fear of the Lord look like?
  - Joyously delighting in God's Word. *“Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!”* (Psalm 112:1)
  - Consistently walking in God's ways. *“Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!”* (Psalm 128:1)
  - Boldly declaring God's works. *“Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done.”* (Psalm 64:9)
  - Patiently waiting for God's rewards. *“but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”* (Psalm 147:11)
- What are some benefits of the fear of the Lord? (19 benefits)
  - God's friendship: *“The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him. . . .”* (Psalm 25:14)
  - God's goodness: *“Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!”* (Psalm 31:19)
  - God's supply: *“Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!”* (Psalm 34:9)
  - God's salvation (Psalm 85:9)
  - God's fulfillment: *“Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!”* (Psalm 34:9)
  - God's lovingkindness (Psalm 103:11)
  - God's increase (Psalm 115:13-15)
  - God's pleasure (Psalm 147:11)

- God's instruction (Psalm 25:12)
- God's knowledge (Proverbs 1:7)
- God's understanding : *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.”* (Psalm 111:10)
- God's wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)
- God's compassion (Ps 103:13)
- Longer life (Prov 10:27)
- Avoid evil (Prov 16:6)
- Riches and honor (Prov 22:4)
- Spiritual confidence: *“In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.”* (Proverbs 14:26)
- Praise (Prov 31:30)
- God's blessing (Ps 112:1-6)
- In what way is the “fear of the LORD” the “beginning of wisdom?”
  - Foundation of a house, not the first stage of a rocket
  - Alphabet to reading, notes to music, numerals to mathematics
  - No graduation from this school
  - "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you don't fear God, you fear everything else."  
-Oswald Chambers.

### **Conclusion**

So, now that you have an overview of the book of Proverbs and understand a little bit more how it is put together and its main message being the fear of the LORD, how will you grow in the joy of fearing God this week? Don't just take all this knowledge and sit on it this week, but live wisely by fearing God. Consider:

- How can you demonstrate the fear of God in your home and at work? How can you teach your children the fear of God?
- How do you need to grow in the fear of God or in applying your heart to wisdom more this year?
- And since the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, o prepare your heart for next Sunday's message, please read Proverbs 1-9 which is Solomon's call to wisdom!

To live wisely, we must fear the LORD! We must live in bitter dread of offending a holy God, yet live in sweet submission and reverence to Him as our Father, not as a tyrannical slave master. That's how we need to begin living wisely. For the ultimate folly is trying to live in God's world without God ! Don't do that this week!

